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ABSTRACT

The Manitoba School Act of 1890 was an insult to the French Canadian culture and religion. New settlers in Manitoba brought with them the model of the Ontario school system, and as the new majority of Manitoba, they, through the Manitoba government, abolished French as an official language. At the same time, single, tax supported public schools were set up and that meant the Catholic schools would no longer receive public funding. The reaction of the Roman Catholic French minority was evident in the comments made in newspapers and a petition signed by many members of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Canada. Most Francophones wanted the federal government to disallow or even cancel the Provincial Act of Manitoba. For years the school question went before the courts and the federal government. In 1896 the Laurier-Greenway Compromise agreement was reached among the English speaking Pretestant majority of Manitoba. Serving as an amendment to the Manitoba School Act of 1890, the Laurier-Greenway Compromise was an attempt to erase the insult directed toward the French speaking Catholic minority in 1890. Although the Compromise eased the crisis, the insult was not completely erased. (Author/CK)

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THE MANITOBA SCHOOL ACT OF 1890: AN INSULT TO THE FRENCH ROMAN CATHOLICS

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SO 024 256

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The Manitoba School Act of 1890 was an insult to the French Canadian culture and religion. This is shown by examining the following issues: a comparison of the Manitoba School Act of 1870 with the Act of 1890, the opinion of Dalton McCarthy and of Rev. Dr. John King, the reaction of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, the reaction of the Roman Catholic French Manitoban minority, the reaction of the Manitoba Free Press, and by the attempt to compromise in 1896 (Laurier-Greenway Compromise).

In 1870, the Manitoban government passed the Public School Act which was meant to safeguard the rights of the French speaking Catholics of Manitoba. This Act "... set up a Quebec style dual school system with Roman Catholic and Protestant Superintendents"(Tomkins, p.48). This Act meant that both the English and the French languages were to be recognized as the official languages of Manitoba.

The French speaking people, who made up the slight majority of the population of Manitoba at the time of the passing of the Public School Act of 1870, felt content with this type of school system. It was to be a ...

> denominational school system compromised of twenty-four school districts, twelve Catholic and twelve Protestant, in accordance with the division of the population. Each school district was governed by a board of trustees which was responsible for providing school facilities and hiring teachers. This dual school system was supported by public funds with equal grants to both Protestant and Catholic institutions (Friesen & Potyondi, p.62).

The population began to increase with the influx of more English speaking Protestants from the East, particularily from Ontario. These people became the new majority of Manitoba. With them came demands for more schools, and the expansion of teacher training and secondary school facilities. There was also a debate over the merits of Manitoba having a dual school system based on religious differences.

The French speaking Catholics, now the minority in Manitoba, began to increasingly worry. They felt that there would no longer be French schools and that the

Catholic religion would no longer be taught in schools. Their worries soon became justified. The new settlers in Manitoba had brought with them the model of the Ontario school system. Now, because they formed the new majority of Manitoba, they, through the Manitoba government, abolished French as an official language and set up a new, single, tax supported public school system which meant that the Catholic schools would no longer receive public funding. This was the Manitoba School Act of 1890, which went against everything that the French had been guaranteed in 1870 by the Manitoba Public School Act. It led to " ... cultural strife that ... threatened to destroy the nation"(Cook, Ricker & Saywell, p.140).

There are attitudes expressed by some which show the insult directed towards the French speaking Catholic minority. As recorded in the Manitoba Free Press, 1889, Dalton McCarthy said: " I was proud and happy to learn that ... Manitoba is going to eliminate French schools... . We must start to eliminate the rights of the French. I say one people, one language, one school system "(Kirbyson et al., p.166). Reverend Dr. John M. King stated that "...the system of separate, or sectarian schools operates injuriously on the well being of the state..."(Clark, p.45). It was these types of attitudes which insulted the French speaking Catholics.

The Catholic hierarchy was insulted by the passing of the Manitoba School Act of 1890, both individually and collectively. Bishop LaFlèche expressed his individual opinion in a letter of appeal dated May 12, 1890 to the Honourable J.A. Chapleau, Secretary of State, Ottawa. He said: "[i]n my humble opinion... it involves a direct violation of sentiments dearest to the heart of man, his love for his native tongue and his religion"(Clark, p.123).

The Archbishop of St. Boniface, Alexandre Taché, expressed his opinion in an article written by him in 1893 entitled "Are the Public Schools of Manitoba the Continuation of the Protestant Schools of the Same Province ?". He contended that: " [t]he law that has ended the two school system is bad. All it did, ..., was to turn contented

French people into angry ones. The law has upset the peaceful relations between the francophones and the anglophones..."(Kirbyson et al., p.166).

A petition signed by many members of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Canada, (May, 1894), expressed their dismay over the insult of the French Catholics. In the petition of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Canada dated May, 1894, the following are included: E.A. Cardinal Tashereau, Archbishop of Quebec; Alexandre Taché, O.M.I., Archbishop of St. Boniface; Edouard Fabre, Archbishop of Montreal; Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal; and John Cameron, Bishop of Antigonish (Clark, pp.132-133). This petition, which was signed by all the Bishops of Quebec, attempted to "...oblige Quebec Roman Catholics in the forthcoming federal election to vote only for those candidates pledged to support legislation to restore Catholic privileges in Manitoba"(Crunican, p.52).

The reaction of the Roman Catholic French minority shows the insult directed towards them by the Manitoba School Act of 1890. Most Francophones wanted the federal government to disallow or even cancel the Provincial Act of Manitoba. For years the School Question went before the courts and the federal government.

The opponents of the Act said that it was unconstitutional. "Catholics were left with the conviction that they had suffered a moral wrong at the hands of the majority" (Morton, 1970, p.272). Dr. J.K. Barrett, a Catholic, challenged the right of the school district of Winnipeg to compel him to pay taxes for the support of its schools. The Manitoba courts found against him, the Supreme Court of Canada reversed the judgement of the Manitoba courts, but then the Privy Council in England reversed the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. The French Roman Catholics were truly upset with the proceedings as "... these decisions climaxed three years of bitter conflict..."(Chafe, p.131). The Roman Catholics of Manitoba "... were dismayed by the Privy Council decision" (Jackson, p.144).

Bishop Taché noted how the French Roman Catholic Canadians felt about the law in his article entitled "Are the Public Schools of Manitoba the Continuation of the Protestant Schools of the Same Province" stating that " [t]he French speaking Canadians felt that the law ... was unfair. Why should they be forced to support schools that do not teach their children their own language? Schools that do not permit francophones to learn about their own religion?"(Kirbyson et al., p.166).

The Roman Catholic minority of Manitoba, like the Roman Catholic hierarchy, started a petition against the Manitoba School Act. In this petition, dated August, 1890, the following names can be found: Alexandre Taché; Henri F., Évêque d`Anemour; Joseph Messier, P.P. of St. Boniface; T.A. Bernier; M.A. Girard, senator; J. Dubuc; A.A. La Rivière, M.P.; L.A. Prudhomme; James E. Prendergast, M.P.P.; Roger Marion, M.P.P.; and 4257 others (Clark, p.125).

That it was an insult to the French Canadian culture can be shown in the reaction by others in Manitoba. The Manitoba Free Press was against the decision of the Legislature to pass the Manitoba School Act. An editorial in the Manitoba Free Press, published August 25, 1889, stated that "...Separate Schools... are a privilege conceeded to Roman Catholics by the Constitution, confirmed by years of possession, and which now cannot be taken away without a gross violation of faith, a cowardly exercise of accidental power, and a serious menace to the whole fabric of Confederation"(Clark, p.42).

In 1896 there was an agreement reached between the English speaking Protestant majority of Manitoba and the French speaking Catholic minority of Manitoba. It was called the Laurier-Greenway Compromise of 1896 and it was enacted by the government of Manitoba in 1897 as an amendment to the Manitoba School Act of 1890. According to the amendment, "... religious teaching,..., was permitted in public schools from 3:30 to 4:30 P.M.,... . The amendment also provided that when two or more pupils spoke French.... instruction should be in French and English upon the bilingual system"(Morton, 1951 p.51). This was an attempt to erase the insult directed towards the

French speaking Catholic minority in 1890. Even though it eased the crisis, it did not completely erase the insult. There were people within the Catholic religion opposed to it because they felt that it added to the insult. "With religious education and French culture at stake, the bishops regarded Laurier's statement as little short of heresy and cultural betrayal"(Cook, et al., p.139).

The Manitoba School Act of 1890 was an insult to the French Canadian culture and religion. This has been shown by comparing the Manitoba Public School Act of 1870 to the Manitoba School Act of 1890, by looking at the attitudes of certain people (Dalton McCarthy, Reverend Dr. John King), by the reactions of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, by the reactions of the Roman Catholic French minority, by the reaction of the Manitoba Free Press, and by the attempt of compromise in 1896 (Laurier-Greenway Compromise). As to the degree of the insult, we can look to a response of the highest level of Roman Catholic religion. In the Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, December 18, 1897, he wrote: "As to what regards particularily the Catholics of Manitoba, we have confidence that, God helping, they will one day obtain full satisfaction"(Clark, p.218). In other words, he wished for a complete erasure of the insult received due to the passing of the Manitoba School Act of 1890.

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